

NEWS

Franchisee has flair for publicity

by Louise Kramer

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. — McDonald's Corp. has gained its gravitas in the global fast-food industry by instituting strict quality control practices and working to make sure the operators of its 18,380 restaurants stick to all the rules.

However, that doesn't mean franchisees can't have fun, especially, even in these days of stiff competition among the major burger chains.

Max Cooper, a McDonald's franchisee based here, has brought a certain mad and playful marketing pizzazz to the larger chain for 29 years. An affable man with a ready, yet soft-assailing chuckle, Cooper has been able to work within the structure of the larger giant to grow a franchise that now boasts 47 McDonald's restaurants in Birmingham, Anniston and Gadsden, Ala. The number of restaurants makes him one of the largest franchisees of McDonald's, which says its average franchisee owns three restaurants.

The son of a Chicago baker, Cooper started his career in public relations and was always drawn to fame as a side issue. His previous career involved videotaping winter baseball games in Cuba for broadcast in the United States just as Fidel Castro was rising to power and won't be a game without a cigar-wielding Castro. A public-relations firm he founded with Ben



Max Cooper, who operates one of the largest McDonald's franchises, is credited with helping popularize the "Two all-beef patties" phrase.

and was later a major force behind the chain's value marketing strategy.

Just last winter, to bring a little entertainment to the Adirondack region \$4,000 to have two trackloads of snow brought in from Sault Ste. Marie, Mich., and Ellington, Ill. He got the idea for the carpet when he saw a news item on TV about a town being those snow-swamped towns wanted to give their snow away. The stunt garnered widespread — and free — media coverage and drew snow-wary Alabamians to Cooper's restaurants.

Although past retirement age, Cooper, who likes to

ate a plain hamburger and invented his lunch companion try a new McDonald's chicken sandwich. Later, he said, he would prepare a gourmet pasta dish, or whatever fancy food is as much a passion for him as selling Big Macs and french fries.

Cooper found he had a talent for publicity as an enlisted man in the U.S. Army. As a young man, he became a publicity agent after stints as a bakery owner, a carpet salesman and a human prop on a television show that was directed by a friend named Irvin Kupcinet. "He would hold a glass, and my elbow would be on the phone. I got \$1,500," Cooper recalled.

He started working for a local restaurateur, Irvin "all you can eat" Burns, and paid him \$6 for placing items in Irvin Kupcinet's gossip column in the Chicago Sun-Times. "In the first week I had him in three times," said Cooper, with a note of pride in his voice. "It was an other relish for telling stories. This became too expensive. He became my very first client for \$200 a month. I was now in the publicity business."

Then came the McDonald's move in 1957, with an initial billing of \$200 spent on working to get free publicity that would associate the chain's name with hamburgers in the public consciousness. "We were getting positive publicity," Cooper said. "We used to create statistics on the hamburgers they sold."

"He's a quintessential nudge for a always been a maverick," said Cooper's son partner, Geltin, who stayed in the public-relations business and is now chairman of Geltin/Harris Communications in Chicago and still an adviser to McDonald's. "He's been that way since he was a young fellow in our business. He had a great feel for what the public wanted."

By the early 1960s Cooper was working closely with Ray Kroc, McDonald's founder, "who looked after the numbers" and later became company president, while Ray (See MCDONALD'S, page 22)



Early in his career Max Cooper, left, filmed baseball games in Cuba for broadcast in the United States. Here he poses with Fidel Castro.

Burns and Al Geltin became McDonald's first public-relations agency before it could afford to take itself through major advertising.

Over the years Cooper championed such marketing ideas as co-sponsoring the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York City. After he became a franchisee he helped prepare the jingle "Two all-beef patties special sauce lettuce cheese pickles onions on a sesame seed bun"

leave his exact age a mystery, still keeps a close watch on his restaurants and is working to expand them. Cooper, CLP Corp. of Birmingham, even more. He is so involved in his restaurants, in fact, that he can scarcely enter a unit without stopping at the french fry station to help out. In 1984, Cooper invited guest from his business recently to discuss his nearly four decades with the largest burger chain at the world. He

Excerpt •

— An

Book —

by the

Accommodation

There's a simple formula for guest accommodation



It's The Accommodation Program

Seating Formula which helps you designate seating that will accommodate non-smokers and smokers alike.

And it's just one of the many suggestions for accommodation you'll find in The Accommodation Program restaurant

Source Book. Receive it FREE along with a catalog for other FREE materials when you participate in

The Accommodation Program.

Look for the reply card in this publication or call 1-800-929-1414.



The Accommodation Program
Courtesy of Dugay Minton Incorporated